AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1.   (Original) A method of processing postal items, which method consists, during a first pass for sorting the items, in taking (12) a digital picture of a postal item, in deriving (15) from said picture a digital fingerprint (V-ID) which is a logic identifier for the item, and in storing the fingerprint of the item in a memory in correspondence with data about the item, and consists, during a second pass for sorting the items, in taking again (51) a digital picture of a current mail item, in deriving (52) from said image a digital fingerprint for the current item, and in searching the fingerprints recorded in the first sorting pass for a match with the fingerprint of the current item in order to retrieve the data about the item by association;

said method being characterized in that:

during the first sorting pass, said method further consists, in the memory, in associating (16) the fingerprints of the successive items with corresponding chronological serial numbers (SN); and

during the second sorting pass, for a series of successive item fingerprints for which matches have been obtained with fingerprints recorded in the memory in the first sorting pass, said method further consists in retrieving (61) a series (S1, S2) of corresponding chronological serial numbers, in computing (62, 65) an estimated chronological serial number for

2

a current item from said series of chronological serial numbers, and in searching (63) for a match

with the fingerprint of the current item on the basis of the estimated chronological serial number.

2.   (Original) A method according to claim 1, in which the computation of the

estimated chronological serial number consists in a linear approximation.

3.   (Original) A method according to claim 2, in which two chronological serial

numbers are computed (65) by linear approximation on the basis of two series of successive item

fingerprints, and a distance between the two computed chronological serial numbers is measured.

4.   (Currently Amended) A method according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 3~~claim 1, in

which the search for a match is performed on the fingerprints recorded in the first sorting pass in

an exploration space centered around the fingerprint associated with a computed chronological

serial number.

5.   (Currently Amended) A method according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 4~~claim 1, in

which the postal items are directed to the sorting outlet bins of a sorting machine and in which

the chronological order is the order in which the items are loaded into the sorting outlet bins.

6.   (Currently Amended) A method according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 5~~claim 1, in

which the chronological serial number is constituted by the juxtaposition of a sorting center

number, of a sorting machine number, of a sorting outlet bin number, and of a chronological

index.

7.   (Currently Amended) A machine for sorting postal items that is arranged to

implement the method according to ~~any preceding claim~~claim 1.